

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

450 South State
P.O. Box 140241
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-0241
801-578-3800

NEWS RELEASE



Christine M. Durham
Chief Justice, Utah Supreme Court

Daniel J. Becker
State Court Administrator

The Utah State Courts are committed to open, fair, and independent justice.

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Contact: Nancy Volmer
(801) 578-3994
Cell: (801) 712-4545

SURVEYS REVEAL HIGH LEVEL OF PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN THE COURTS

Salt Lake City, Utah—The public's trust and confidence in the Utah State Courts is high, according to results from two surveys conducted by The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) this past summer.

The Utah Judicial Council commissioned two court surveys to determine the public's view of the judiciary. The first survey measured court users' views on access to and fairness of the courts, while the second survey measured the public's knowledge, experience, and expectations of the courts.

The survey results showed that the majority of respondents had a positive perception about the judiciary, felt Utah's courts were accessible, and that court employees are respectful and responsive in working with the public. Survey results also revealed that the Internet is the public's leading source of information about the judiciary. Court users reported finding the state court's website to be a helpful and valuable tool.

The media was also a frequent source of information about the judiciary. Individuals who were more familiar with the courts reported getting their information through TV news and newspapers, while those less familiar with the courts got their information from TV dramas, such as "Law and Order."

One survey showed that individuals who were involved with the courts through jury duty were more confident in the system as a result. Another encouraging finding for the judiciary was that court users reported no barriers to justice when questioned about hours of operation, location, forms, language, and disability.

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But the results were not all glowing. The Judicial Council learned that the courts are not meeting the public's expectations when it comes to reporting on the work of the courts and informing the public about self-represented litigant resources. In addition, a notable percentage of court users reported dissatisfaction with the time needed to complete their courthouse visit.

"The Judicial Council will use the data to ensure the public continues to have access to justice and is treated fairly in the courts," said Utah State Court Administrator Dan Becker. "Learning how the public feels about our performance will help us provide better service. Our goal is to enhance the public's trust and confidence in the courts."

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KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Purpose: The Public Trust and Confidence Survey was conducted to determine the current perceptions the public has of the Utah State Court system. The survey shows that nearly 77 percent of the public has a positive attitude about the courts.

The Access and Fairness Survey was conducted to gauge the experience of people who are doing business with the Utah State Courts.

Barriers to Access: Those who considered taking a case to court but decided not to, reported attorney cost as the primary reason followed by finding an alternate solution and time for a court decision.

Those using the courts said the courthouses were accessible and felt safe while in the courthouses. The public felt strongly about having to pay for parking.

Confidence in the Courts: Court case outcomes had an impact on court confidence levels. Individuals whose case resulted in a favorable result reported being more confident in the courts, while those reporting unfavorable results were less confident.

Experience with the Courts: About half of respondents had direct experience with the courts. Most reported involvement through jury duty in an adult criminal matter. Respondents who had involvement with the court tended to be more confident in the court system, namely those called to jury duty.

Expectations: Respondents reported that the court was not meeting the expectations in two primarily areas: regular reporting and assisting self-represented parties.

Fairness: Respondents felt the court treated them with respect and responded to their needs.

Knowledge of the Courts: More than half of respondents said they were familiar with the Utah State Courts, namely District Courts.

Sources of Information: Those seeking information about the courts went primarily to the Internet and Utah State Courts' Web site. Of those using the court Web site, 100 percent felt it

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was useful. Individuals learned about the Utah State Courts through television news, while a significant number of people reported getting information about the courts from television dramas, such as “Law and Order,” “CSI,” “Judge Judy,” and “Court TV.” Those who were less familiar with the courts reported getting information from TV dramas, while those who were more familiar with the courts got their information from the Internet.

Methods: Salt Lake City-based Valley Research conducted the Public Trust and Confidence Survey statewide via telephone. Valley Research surveyed 1,201 Utah households June 28 through July 20, 2006, asking 53 questions about the public’s perception, familiarity, experience, confidence, expectations, and performance of the state courts. The demographic make-up of the survey respondents is as follows: 50 percent were male and 50 percent were female; most were married and long-time residents of Utah; more than half of respondents were between the age of 18 and 44; most were employed full time with an income ranging between \$35,000 to \$75,000; most had some college education; majority surveyed were Caucasian. The survey was funded in part by a \$15,000 grant from the State Justice Institute.

Court interns administered the Access and Fairness Survey during the summer of 2006. Responses were collected for one day at each of the court sites. Every person at the courthouse that day was eligible, except people visiting an agency other than the court. The survey was administered as people left the courthouse. If a Justice Court was co-located in the courthouse, those responses were included, however, the survey was not administered at justice courts. The survey was funded in part by a \$11,580 grant from the State Justice Institute.

The survey results are available on the Utah State Courts’ Web site
<http://www.utcourts.gov/survey>

SJI is a nonprofit organization that was established by federal law to award grants to do the following: improve the quality of justice in state courts nationwide; facilitate better coordination between state and federal courts; and foster innovative, efficient solutions to common problems faced by all courts. For more information on the institute, go to www.statejustice.org.

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